United Nations

United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation

Report of the fifty-third session (26-30 September 2005)

General Assembly
Official Records
Sixtieth session
Supplement No. 46 (A/60/46)

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Note

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1. Since its creation by the General Assembly by its resolution 913 (X) of 3 December 1955, the mandate of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation has been to undertake broad reviews of the sources of ionizing radiation and its effects on the health of humans and the environment. Exposure to radiation occurs from sources such as nuclear electricity generation; past weapons tests; natural background radiation; accidents such as the one at Chernobyl in 1986; occupations that entail enhanced exposure to man-made or naturally occurring sources; and medical diagnostic and therapeutic procedures. The Committee thoroughly reviews and evaluates global and regional exposures to those sources. It evaluates the evidence for radiation-induced health effects from studies of the health of survivors of the atomic bombs in Japan and other exposed groups. It also reviews advances in scientific understanding of the mechanisms by which radiation-induced health effects can occur. Such assessments provide the scientific foundation used by the International Commission on Radiological Protection in developing its recommendations on radiation protection and by the relevant agencies within the United Nations system in formulating the International Basic Safety Standards for Protection against Ionizing Radiation and for the Safety of Radiation Sources.

2. The Committee[1] held its fifty-third session[2] in Vienna from 26 to 30 September 2005. Yasuhito Sasaki (Japan), Peter Burns (Australia) and Norman Gentner (Canada) served as Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur, respectively. At that session the Committee continued the development of new documents on the sources and effects of ionizing radiation last reviewed at the fifty-second session of the Committee (26-30 April 2004) and reported on to the General Assembly in its report on that session.[3]

3. The Committee noted that, in its resolution 59/114 of 10 December 2004, the General Assembly had reaffirmed the decision to maintain the present functions and independent role of the Committee; endorsed the intentions and plans of the Committee for its future activities of scientific review and assessment on behalf of the Assembly; emphasized the need for the Committee to hold regular sessions on an annual basis; requested the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to continue providing support for the effective conduct of the work of the Committee and for the dissemination of its findings to the Assembly, the scientific community and the public; and urged UNEP to review and strengthen the present funding of the Committee.

4. The need for restoration of an operating budget adequate to allow the Committee to fulfil its mandate from the General Assembly, expressed most recently in resolutions 58/88 of 9 December 2003 and 59/114, remained of concern. While increased funds had been provided for the essential task of recruiting consultants, only partial restitution had occurred. The Committee expressed its disappointment with the rejection of an additional Professional post necessary to avoid the vulnerabilities that had of late hampered efficient implementation of the approved programme of work. Diminished effectiveness was of concern at the current time owing to the anticipated public interest in the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident and the forthcoming revision of the Basic Safety Standards. The Committee anticipated that funding in the biennium 2008-2009 would be

strengthened pursuant to resolution 59/114 and understood that UNEP would provide additional resources in 2006-2007 in order that the plans endorsed by the Assembly could be carried out effectively.[4]

5. At its fifty-third session, the Committee held detailed technical discussions that resulted in clear direction as to the content and form of its future scientific annexes. It was envisaged that a report to the General Assembly with scientific annexes would be made in 2006, with additional annexes to be considered in 2007. The deliberations were focused on reviewing advanced draft documents on topics that included analyses of exposures of workers and the public to various sources of radiation; re-evaluation of the risks from radon in homes and workplaces; review of the risk and effects of radiation on non-human biota; consideration of new evidence for the mechanisms by which ionizing radiation can induce health effects; evaluation of new epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer; review of evidence for diseases other than cancer that might be related to radiation exposure; analysis of the wide variability globally in medical radiation exposures; and analysis of the health impacts due to radiation from the Chernobyl accident.

6. The Committee had participated in the Chernobyl Forum, whose important mission had covered many aspects of the Chernobyl accident, including the review of radiation health effects. The Committee noted that recent findings of the Forum had affirmed the scientific conclusions[5] on the health consequences due to radiation from the Chernobyl accident, which had been reported by the Committee to the General Assembly in the year 2000.[6] The Committee would continue to provide the scientific basis for better understanding of the radiation health effects of the accident.

7. The Committee noted that the Secretariat had been approached by several States expressing an interest in participating in the work of the Committee, thereby providing further direct evidence of the value assigned by States to its activities. The Committee called upon all Member States, specialized agencies of the United Nations system and other scientific international and national bodies to make available relevant information for its reviews, whose quality and completeness critically depend on such information.

8. It was noted that 14 March 2006 would mark the fiftieth anniversary of the first session of the Committee. The Committee intended to commemorate that anniversary, raise awareness of its activities outside the traditional scientific community and make available relevant material on its achievements.

9. The Committee decided to hold its fifty-fourth session in Vienna from 29 May to 2 June 2006. To guide the Committee, new officers were elected to serve at the fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth sessions: Peter Burns (Australia), Chairman, Norman Gentner (Canada), Vice-Chairman, and Wolfgang Weiss (Germany), Rapporteur.

Notes

[1] The Committee is composed of scientists from the following 21 States: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Sudan, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America. Though the work of the Committee is

performed primarily by scientists from its 21 member States, it is carried out on behalf of all States Members of the United Nations and the international scientific community. The secretariat of the Committee, located in Vienna, organizes and services its annual sessions and manages the preparation of assessments requested by the Committee for its scientific scrutiny.

[2] The fifty-third session was also attended by observers from the European Union, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Commission on Radiological Protection, the International Commission on Radiation Units and Measurements and the World Health Organization.

[3] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 46* (A/59/46).

[4] Ibid., *Sixtieth Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/60/7 and Corr.1), para. IV.46.

[5] The findings of the Forum with regard to radiation health consequences are also consistent with those of two previous international initiatives in which the Committee participated, namely, the International Conference, One Decade after Chernobyl, held in Vienna from 8 to 12 April 1996, and the 1991 International Chernobyl Project.

[6] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 46* (A/55/46).